

the beginning of

WHY EMILY NEEDS THAT OUTFIT (from **FEMALE PERSUASION**)

a short play by Rich Orloff

Two women in a room. EMILY is a plain, nervous woman in her mid-forties. SYLVIA is inescapably fatigued from eighty years of living. Emily is in the midst of talking.

EMILY

...Anyway, as long as I was in the neighborhood, I decided to drop by Nordstrom's, just to browse, mind you. But then I saw this cashmere sweater and pants combination which, oh, it just took my heart away. It was nothing fancy-looking but, oh God, was it elegant. Subtle earth tones, slightly slinky pants; I looked great in it. I can't really afford it, but it's better than anything I have in my closet, and it's been so long since I've bought myself anything. So I've decided that tomorrow, as soon as I get off for lunch, that outfit is mine.

SYLVIA

Why bother?

EMILY

Because of that dinner party I told you about. Look, I won't know a single soul there, and if I'm wearing a new outfit, well, I just think I'll have a much better time. It's been so long since I've been invited to – anything where there are new people. I want to make the most of it.

SYLVIA

Why bother?*

(*As you'll notice, Sylvia tends to say this a lot. It's essential that the actress give each speech a unique inflection, as if Sylvia is asking this question or making this comment for the first time.)

EMILY

I need to meet new people. My friends are nice, but... I need to meet new people, that's all.

SYLVIA

Why bother?

EMILY

Because the friends I have just aren't enough. Carole, Laurie, I mean, they're perfectly nice. Everyone I know is perfectly nice. But... but let's face it, they're as boring as I am. I need to meet new faces. I really need to meet new faces.

(She stops. Then:)

And if one of them were male, that wouldn't be so bad, either.

SYLVIA

Why bother?

EMILY

I have those needs, Mother.

(When Sylvia doesn't reply:)

Just because Henry and I didn't work out, and just because nothing since then has worked out... I still need and want male companionship.

SYLVIA

Why bother?

EMILY

Because I'm a woman. Because I'm still young enough to have... needs.

(A beat.)

Sexual needs.

SYLVIA

Why bother?

EMILY

Certain things are out of my control, Mother. I'll never know how you were able to keep a rein on those things after Dad died, but... I'll be honest with you. More times than not, I wish I didn't have those needs. But I do. And I'm not knocking you or your generation or anything, but - I'm a human being; I have to acknowledge that.

SYLVIA

Why bother?

EMILY

Look, I've kept myself bottled up most of my life. This may sound odd to you, but it actually takes me a fair amount of courage to admit I'm human... especially to my mother. All my life I've tried to pretend I'm some sort of "mock human", always doing the right thing, always thinking of others, never creating conflicts with anyone, always fitting in... as if the biggest sin possible is to make waves. I'm tired of it. I've pretended I've never felt anger, rage, envy, irrational feelings – I've pretended these things even to myself. Well, no more. I want to make a wave. I decided this in therapy yesterday. Then I went to Nordstrom's and saw this outfit, and damn it, buying that outfit may just be the most *human* thing I've done in my entire life. It's a first step in telling the world, and reaffirming to myself... I *exist*.

SYLVIA

(looking straight at
her for the first time)

Why bother?